

How Video Blogging Will Define Your Agency  
Is Your Department Ready?

By

Lieutenant Mark Riggs  
Fremont Police Department

May 2009

Command College Class 44

The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

© Copyright 2008

California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training

## **How Video Blogging Will Define Your Agency**

### **Is Your Department Ready?**

Why should law enforcement officials care about video blogging? Isn't video blogging just for computer geeks who post their ideas on line for their friend's entertainment? Before you answer this question, I want you to ponder this scenario. Imagine your agency was involved in a critical incident where an officer used force that was captured on video by onlookers. This video was then uploaded to a user generated hosting site with their perspective of the incident. In just days, more than 2 million people have viewed the video and thousands have begun to leave blogs regarding the use of force by your officer. Without any input from the department, the viewers will form opinions regarding professionalism and appropriateness. These opinions can either improve your reputation with the community or start a public relations nightmare. Still need more proof? Let's take a look at a real life scenario.

A man and his pregnant wife were stopped by a Utah State Trooper for speeding. The male driver got out of his vehicle and verbally argued with the officer about where the speed limit sign was located. During the enforcement stop, the officer used his Taser on the driver. The officer ordered the pregnant wife back in the car. Without pointing the finger of blame, the driver received a copy of the in-car-camera video and posted it on the Internet hosting site YouTube.<sup>1</sup> The driver posted the entire video he received from the police and asked a simple question of the viewers, "Is this how you want your police to act?" The majority of the viewers were outraged and posted their displeasure with the police action. As of 02/01/2008, over 1.5

---

<sup>1</sup>Jared Messy. 2007. State trooper car video. On-line. Available from Internet, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH\\_qVlfaYZA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NH_qVlfaYZA), accessed 6 March 2009.

million people had viewed the video. The driver's efforts to effect change through the use of this video blog had a major impact on the State Police. Since the video blog was posted, the State Police have engaged in a public relations effort to rebuild their public reputation and trust in their department.

The Utah State Police conducted a press conference shortly after the internal investigation of the incident to address the overwhelming public outcry. During the press conference, Utah Public Safety Commissioner Scott Duncan said "The video of that incident made its way around the Internet and got the attention of people around the world. Some were infuriated; others supported the trooper. We are worried about public confidence, and that maybe the confidence with the Highway Patrol, with the Department of Public Safety and law enforcement in general was damaged here, and so we hope to restore that confidence."<sup>2</sup> Duncan went on to say the trooper was cleared for the use of the Taser; however, Duncan did admit there was a lack of communication on the part of the trooper.

Utah State Police is not the only law enforcement agency to have one for their videos posted on the Internet and seen by millions. Many sites like YouTube regularly host videos of law enforcement officers using force with just one point of view. This new communication tool needs to have law enforcement's point of view. Video blogging has a potential to change the face of policing and how we communicate without communities.

### **Trend for more mobile technology connected to the Internet**

---

<sup>2</sup> Gene Kennedy & Tonya Papainikolas. 2007. UHP Probe Clears Trooper in Taser Incident. KSL Television Channel 5 Utah. Online. Available from Internet, <http://www.ksl.com/?nid=148&sid=2245753>, accessed March 13<sup>th</sup> 2009.

Internet communication has become commonplace in today's society. Emails and text messaging are providing people with the opportunity to communicate globally. Blogging (online journals or videos) has become a popular forum to express opinions and provide points of view. "Blogs, or online journals, are a way for internet users to express themselves creatively or to document their experiences. About one in ten Internet users contribute to a blog; one in three Internet users read blogs."<sup>3</sup> Consumers are now using blogging sites to review restaurants, travel sites, and other businesses to make sure they get the best deal.

New technology and hardware has made Internet communication even easier and more mobile than ever before. The public is demanding quick information and immediate answers to their questions. Mobile-handheld device manufacturers have begun to target those needs. After charting the habits of more than 10,000 adults for six months after the iPhone's U.S. launch, the measurement firm M:Metrics concludes that nearly 85 percent of iPhone purchases regularly use their handheld devices to access news and other content on the web.<sup>4</sup> As this usage increases, the actions of law enforcement will undoubtedly be one of the sources of the daily news in this format.

Video is quickly becoming the most popular medium in the world. No other media captures the fascination of the viewer more than video. James McQuivey Ph.D. a principle analyst at Forrester Research, recently published a study titled, "How video will take over the

---

<sup>3</sup> Lenhardt, Amanda. Bloggers. The Pew Institute. On-line. Available from Internet, <http://www.pewinternet.org/topics/Blogs.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> Bryan Gardiner. 2008. Survey Confirms iPhone Users Are Hard-Core Internet Junkies. Wired Magazine. Online. Available from Internet, <http://blog.wired.com/business/2008/03/survey-confirms.html>, accessed March 13<sup>th</sup> 2009.

world.”<sup>5</sup> In this study, McQuivey discusses the trends that indicate video will evolve into an even more powerful medium he calls, “Omni-video.” He asserts that “Omni video includes today’s TV content experiences and devices but goes far beyond these, creating new content, distribution, and device possibilities, all of which feed the human need to consume video experiences.”<sup>6</sup> McQuivey believes video media and the ability for the user to access video content with new mobile devices will dramatically increase in the next few years. “Omni video is about to explode, driving up total viewing time from 4 hours per day to 5 hours by 2013, increasing you and your competitors’ marketing potential.” Although this research was focused mainly on business opportunities, there are many lessons for law enforcement agencies to learn from this as well. The main lesson is to be aware of the new technology advances and to use it to our advantage.

Hand held devices are becoming more popular due to technological advances and the ease of connectivity to the Internet. Today’s “smart phone” has taken us to a new dimension by allowing users to connect to the Internet and perform functions that historically were done by a desktop computer. These hand held devices have hardware options that allow the user to capture digital images, video, and audio files that are easily transferred to the Internet for viewing by all. YouTube is easy to use and posting digital media for display is fast. Digital video and still cameras can be purchased off the shelf ready to upload video directly for display on YouTube.

---

<sup>5</sup> James McQuivey 2008. Forrester: How Video Will Take Over the World. On line. Available from Internet: <http://www.researchrecap.com/index.php/2008/06/20/how-video-will-take-over-the-world/> Accessed 13 July, 2008

<sup>6</sup> James McQuivey 2008. Forrester: How Video Will Take Over the World. On line. Available from Internet: <http://www.researchrecap.com/index.php/2008/06/20/how-video-will-take-over-the-world/> Accessed 13 July, 2008

President Obama plans to use the Internet as a major communications tool, according to White House aides cited in the Washington Post. "As part of the presidential transition, Obama officials are looking to add a significant new media component to the White House communications operation. The campaign employed 95 people in its Internet operations, building a user-friendly Web site that served as a platform for grass-roots activities, distributed statements, policy positions, and footage of Obama events."<sup>7</sup> The President now plans to use tech tools like YouTube and text messaging to communicate directly with the people, bypassing the media entirely to disseminate his message.

President Obama's approach to directly communicate with citizens will give the public first hand information from the White House. Having the "raw data" should minimize misunderstandings, and allow the citizenry to make up their own minds regarding the President's policies or actions. In much the same way, law enforcement will have the same opportunity to use the Internet to communicate directly with their communities. This may have the greatest utility in times where the police want to speak directly to the public quickly to quell rumors or false accusations. The resultant increase in trust can be the capital from which law enforcement executives can make changes, implement policies and manage crises in the future.

### **Implications on the Future of Policing**

Using the Internet to communicate with the public in the form of video addresses, accepting video blogs, and shaping communications to address the new trend in mobile devices will change the norm of communications between the police and the communities they serve.

---

<sup>7</sup> Stirland, Sarah. 2008. Web Will Be A Major Communications Tool Under Obama Presidency. Wire Magazine. On-Line. Available from Internet, [http://blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/online\\_political\\_campaigns/index.html](http://blog.wired.com/27bstroke6/online_political_campaigns/index.html)

Traditionally, local law enforcement communicates with the public in person, on the phone and through email. With video blogging, law enforcement has an additional tool for video addresses, questions and answers and video press releases. The Internet is being used by more people accessing news and current events. Eric Sinrod published an article March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 titled, "This Just In: More People Getting Their News From The Internet Than From Newspapers" that discusses this topic. In his article Sinrod said, "We live in the information age, and plainly people can obtain their news from a variety of sources, with the Internet growing in popularity for national and international news. In addition, people under the age of 30 tend to rely on the Internet more than older age groups. Indeed, 59% of the under-30 set reports that the use of the Internet as a main news source, equal to reliance on television for the news."<sup>8</sup>

It is imperative for law enforcement to join in on this communication opportunity to speak directly to citizens. Bo Bennett, author of Year to Success, discussed the issue regarding people's perception. "Our reality is based on our perceptions. We base our perceptions on a number of factors such as the information we take in, our experiences, our opinions, our feelings and our emotions."<sup>9</sup> Bennett also said video blogging could be the communication tool to provide citizens with facts needed to make educated decisions by the public regarding police actions or policies. This will only happen when law enforcement embraces this new communication tool.

### **Case study- Bakersfield PD**

---

<sup>8</sup> Sinrod, Eric. 2009. This Just In: More People Getting Their News From The Internet Than From Newspapers. Available from the Internet <http://technology.findlaw.com/articles/00006/011247.html>

<sup>9</sup> Bennett, Bo. 2008. Year To Success. Reality is Perception. Igroups LLC, January 1 2008



Video blogging has already made inroads in our profession. The Bakersfield CA Police Department uses Internet-based video to communicate with their public. “BPD Insider”<sup>10</sup> is a series of videos constructed in the field with Bakersfield Police employees fielding questions and providing information on services and current events. The 15-minute webcasts are available from the Police Department website, YouTube, or iTunes. New episodes are posted on the website every month and stored for future viewing by citizens. Bakersfield Police Chief Bill Rector also participates in the Insider with an “Ask the Chief” segment. According to Deputy Chief Lyle Martin, the program is a great success. Martin said, “The public loves it.” He noted this new way of communicating over the Internet through video blogging has improved community relations. Deputy Chief Martin said the positive feedback for the flow of information to the public is evident in the blogs from the citizens, professional organizations, and personal contacts. Deputy Chief Martin said having the feedback from the citizens helps Bakersfield PD provide better services to the public. Bakersfield PD is one of the leaders communicating with the public through the use of Internet communications and video blogging.

Other large departments are now adding video messages and blogging capabilities to their website to increase communications with the public. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) uses video messages from the Chief that can be viewed on the web site. LAPD also uses video clips showing short segments of “Inside LAPD” to provide citizens with the challenges of being a police officer in Los Angeles. The Sacramento Police Department (SPD) uses a blogging component for citizens to ask officers questions. SPD also uses short video segments of “City Beat” to highlight police actions in their city. The San Jose Police

---

<sup>10</sup> D.C. Lyle Martin 2009. Bakersfield PD Website. On line. Available from Internet, <http://www.bpdinsider.us/>

Department and other medium to large agencies are currently using video messages for recruiting purposes only.

Law enforcement must be prepared for all of the challenges and impacts this new line of communication will bring. There will be segments of the population that will never use video blogging. There will be a segment of the population that will use this forum to further their propaganda of the distrust of the police. There will also be a segment of the population that will thrive as a supportive of law enforcement. The main issue for law enforcement will be to get the information out to the public in a timely manner to answer their questions. There will also be challenges for law enforcement to harness this new technology in a way that captures the citizens inquires, allows for alternative points of view, and uses the information gained to better serve the community.

Over time, those agencies that do not video blog or otherwise reach out to their communities via the Internet will become increasingly isolated from those they serve. Record numbers of people are now visiting blogs, proving that blog visitation is now part of mainstream online behavior for many Internet users. "Visitation to blogs continues to grow rapidly, showing a 56-percent increase during the past year to 58.7 million visitors. This figure represents 34 percent of the total Internet audience. Visitation to the Blogs category skews toward younger Internet users. People between the ages of 12 and 17 are 21 percent more likely than average to visit blogs, while those 18 to 34 are 14 percent more likely to do so."<sup>11</sup> This trend indicates more acceptance of video blogging from our younger generations in the future. Law enforcement will have more acceptance of using video blogs from the younger generations than older generations.

---

<sup>11</sup> Matrix, Media. 2006. The Score, Popularity of Blogs. iMedia Connection. On-Line. Available from Internet, <http://www.imediaconnection.com/printpage/printpage.aspx?id=10359>

### **What should we do?**

Law enforcement must take the appropriate steps to make video blogging with law enforcement officials desirable for all citizens to utilize. Law enforcement will need to identify additional or existing departmental personnel to be dedicated to this new technology. The idea of producing department head video addresses and posting them to the web is time consuming and personnel intensive. Dedicated personnel will be needed for video editing, monitoring Q & A video blogs coming in from the public, and managing the website to facilitate this communication tool. Police agencies already manage a high volume of communication on the phone, in person and through email today. If local law enforcement is not prepared for this increase and citizens do not get their questions answered, citizens could stop utilizing this communication tool.

The departmental website must be reconstructed to facilitate this new line of communication. The site must be built for ease of use for all segments of the community to access and provide feedback. The site should include a place for video addresses and press releases that are achieved for viewing at anytime. The site should include easy to use software for citizens to upload their video blog in the form of a question or statement. The question and answer video files are viewed and the press officer provides timely feedback. Another component should be a weekly address by the Chief that discusses the recent major events or policy changes. Most of these changes to the departmental website can be done with minimal costs for the return.

## **Recommendations**

An expert panel was convened to discuss this topic.<sup>12</sup> The panel identified trends in the emerging landscape that will be of assistance to an agency seeking to enter or enhance their presence in the Internet. The panel's recommendations can be used as a roadmap to facilitate that process

First, law enforcement must be willing to change the culture of their agencies to embrace new communication technology and be prepared to utilize it to their advantage. Law enforcement has embraced technology in the past by utilizing in-car video, computer aided dispatching (CAD), computers in the cars, e-mail, web sites, just to name a few. It must also be willing to embrace video blogging as they did with e-mail technology. Law enforcement should monitor this new technology and communication tool to see where it can be used effectively to better serve the community. Without law enforcement's input the public is left to make their own interpretation of complex issues regarding policies and procedures and the use of force.

For example, on March 7th, 2009 The Star in Toronto published an article entitled, "Police Brutality, the Youtube hit." In it, Toronto Attorney Peter Biro recommends all officers record every interaction with civilians. "In the YouTube era, a surfeit of police brutality videos instantly accessible online – a huge number of beatings, and occasional, sensational shootings has cast a growing shadow over police behavior everywhere." For Biro, the circumstance is nowhere near so complex. "Ultimately, (recording all police activity) protects them as much as it exposes them," he says. "When we say exposure, what we're really talking about is transparency

---

<sup>12</sup> Riggs, Mark. 2008. Fremont Police Department. Nominal Group Technique. Held 04/19/2008

... If we're truly committed to the rule of law, what are we afraid of here?"<sup>13</sup> If YouTube is the main source where citizens are forming their perceptions of law enforcement it is not a stretch to believe there could be a negative bias towards police without law enforcements contribution.

Second, law enforcement should search video blogging sites on a regular basis to see how their department is being portrayed. An interesting exercise would be for law enforcement officials to do a search on a popular video blogging such as YouTube, to see how many videos are out there forming people's opinion of their department. The videos should be reviewed to see if there is a constant theme or issue that needs to be addressed throughout the community. Police agencies do not have to respond to each individual's negative video blog. Officials need to know, however, what is out there to formulate a response when necessary.

Third, the majority of law enforcement agencies will feel the need to enter into video blogging and communicating with the public. Once this happens, they must be prepared to train, purchase equipment, and assign the appropriate number of employees for this function. The overall cost of the resources needed for this program is minimal, though, as compared to the positive impact video blogging will have with the community. This will be a huge commitment for law enforcement and the community.

Finally, law enforcement agencies must embrace this new communication tool and the way information flows back in forth to the community. There must be a swift response to questions and the information should be direct and appropriate. Guidelines must be established on proper responses and who is responsible for that body of work. Law enforcement agencies need the public's assistance to do their job effectively. For example, CNN.com posted an article

---

<sup>13</sup> Whyte, Murray. 2009. Police Brutality, the YouTube hit. The Toronto Star. March 07, 2009

titled, "Police departments keeping public informed on Twitter" as an example of this concept. "We think the police department has an obligation to get information out to the community through whatever means or mechanisms we have at our disposal," said Lakeland Police Assistant Chief Bill LePere. "Traditional media releases, expecting the local print media to pick it up and run it in the newspaper tomorrow, is 24 hours too late."<sup>14</sup> The traditional ways of communicating with the public are no longer good enough to meet the needs of our community. Law enforcement officials in these examples are finding the use of Internet sites to be not only speedy, but also a convenient way to distribute press releases, Amber alerts, road closures, and suspect descriptions just to name a few.

## **Conclusion**

The future will determine the popularity of video blogging and how that will affect the reputation of local law enforcement. By understanding current trends and events, and constantly scanning the environment, law enforcement officials will have the information they need to improve communication with the public and shape their own reputation. Bakersfield, Los Angeles and others have used this tool effectively to keep their citizens informed as to current events and department activities. Most police agencies are already utilizing some sort of short videos to give the viewer and insight into the department. It would not take much to move toward utilizing video blogging to enhance the law enforcement's relationship with the public. Law enforcement should not wait or be reactive regarding this issue. The research has shown the current trends and popularity of video blogging. If only the public is using this communication

---

<sup>14</sup> Respers France, Lisa. 2009. Police departments keeping public informed on Twitter. CNN.com. March 20<sup>th</sup> 2009.

tool, it will be one sided and skewed. Law enforcement must prepare for this phenomenon to occur and respond appropriately for the long-term goal of a better-informed public.